

THE MOVEABLE FEST

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Review: The Desire for a Different Life in This One or The Next in Jennifer Fox's "My Reincarnation"



Even amongst non-practitioners of Buddhism, there's often been a romantic notion about reincarnation since the idea we were once someone or something else not only gives us additional character, but would suggest that somehow having past lives channeling through us might serve as a helpful guide to rely on for the future. However, it proves to be a stumbling block for Yeshe, the son of a Tibetan Buddhist Master, whose story of stepping out of his father's considerable shadow is more complex than most in Jennifer Fox's new documentary "My Reincarnation."

Actually, it might be inaccurate to call the film "new" since the "Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman" director spent over 20 years compiling footage for it and surprisingly doesn't include her own history, which after reading the press notes is as fascinating as what made it onscreen. After first meeting Namkai Norbu, a practitioner of Dzogchen, the highest path of Buddhism, in 1985, Fox became his personal secretary for five years and began to collect footage on the side. Yeshe began to enter the frame at 18 and as some of the earliest footage shows, already began to feel estranged from his father.

"Everybody knows me and nobody knows me at all," Yeshe says matter-of-factly in a voiceover, expressing to carve out his own path while witnessing his father entertaining the Dalai Lama in their native Italy from afar. "My Reincarnation" is nearly as plainspoken as it unfolds over the next two decades, Fox visiting Yeshe and Namkai 13 years later, then again six years later as the former takes a job at IBM to support a family and the latter travels the world to tend to his other family – the hundreds of admirers and students who line up to greet Namkai and hear him speak.

Unlike the fractured relationship between the two, the film doesn't suffer from distance – Fox's relationship to both men is clearly a close one. The story has a natural hook when it's learned Yeshe is assigned the same fate as his father since he's told he's the reincarnation of his uncle Khyentse, another celebrated Buddhist teacher, a development



that can only draw him nearer to Namkai since it positions him as a successor in some ways, even if he doesn't appear interested in carrying on tradition. But because of the gaps between Fox's visits, the depiction of Yeshe's transformation is limited despite the vast amount of time covered, leaving behind an arc that's complete with all kinds of questions about why it happened.

Still, the film's unforced nature yields more good than not, treating Namkai's brush with cancer and Yeshe's response with a quiet dignity as well as filling the film with Zen-like imagery of waves crashing at the beach and sunsets that seem wholly organic. "My Reincarnation" isn't a full portrait, nor should it be considering that Namkai and Yeshe's journeys appear to be far from over, but with Fox's incredible commitment, it does feel as if you've experienced a great change in their life with them.

["My Reincarnation"](#) is now open at the Cinema Village in New York and the Monica 4-Plex in Los Angeles before moving onto other cities through the end of the year. A full schedule can be found [here](#).